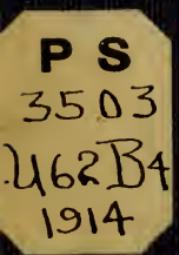


Between Two Lives



C. W. Burkett



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Between Two Lives

A Drama of the Passing of the Old
and the Coming of the New
in Rural Life

By

CHARLES WILLIAM BURKETT

Editor of American Agriculturist

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NOTES TO THE PERFORMERS

In acting a play, words are only a part. What is equally important is action. Each part must be thoroughly studied, committed to memory and then acted. Don't be stiff. Move about on the stage. Don't sit still; don't stand in one place. If you do sit down, let it be just for a moment; then rise and walk to some other part of the stage. Keep moving—move your hands, your feet, your eyes, your head. The point is, be doing something. Study your part and introduce just as many little "acting" features as you can think of. Sam, Rastus, Trueletta and Abagail must make the audience laugh; they must furnish amusement. Each should "work up" little things for doing this. This is the "acting part," and each individual must initiate and originate little things of an "action" nature to go with the lines of the text. It is the same with every role of the play. The more original features thus introduced in connection with the speaking parts, together with lively action, gestures, changes in position on the stage, the brighter will be the play and the greater the interest in the parts and the persons impersonating them.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HENRY WILSON, farmer of the old type.

SARAH, his wife.

JACK, their son.

BETTY, their daughter.

SILAS WATSON, who loans money.

GERTIE BOWERS, teacher of the district school.

WILL JEFFERSON, a city youth with good clothes.

TRUELETTA, the colored girl who helps out.

RASTUS WASHINGTON LINCOLN, colored hostler of
Silas Watson.

SAM SNIPES, the hired man.

DONALD BROOKS, son of a neighbor to the Wilson's,
who loves Betty.

ABAGAIL JONES, who sees vileness in all men.

PRISON GUARD.

COSTUMES

ACT I—Ordinary clothing, as is the custom of the community. Silas wears gingham shirt, straw hat, without coat or vest, suspenders, no necktie and either boots or shoes. Henry similar costume, but of different color. Jack wears ordinary walking shoes, overalls, straw hat. The same for Donald. Gertie and Betty are in neat and clean dresses, color and style to suit. Trueletta in short dress, hair in pigtails, and face and hands colored rather dark. Rastus the same. Rastus wears pants too big for him and only one suspender. Abagail wears clothes not just fitting her. Her face should be rather thin, and “made up” to show oddity in appearance, dress and speech.

ACT II—The stage setting is a modest room of working people in a city. Donald and Jack wear plain clothes, sack coats, etc. Betty, Gertie, Abagail and Mrs. Wilson in keeping with the situation. Rastus should be dressed in starched linen or gingham clothes with high stiff collar, flaming red tie, odd-shaped shoes and hat. Let as much originality as possible enter into “rigging him” out. Trueletta the same.

ACT III—General prosperity is shown. All dressed in clean clothes. Sam in jeans. Donald and Jack in clean work clothes. The same motive in costuming should prevail in this act as in the previous acts. A change of clothes may be made, suiting the wishes of the persons acting the parts. Let every change of costuming be plain and simple, but neat and clean, and planned in the spirit of a sensible, familiar country atmosphere.

BETWEEN TWO LIVES

ACT I

Farmhouse. Combined living and dining room. Door opens to rear in kitchen. Doors at left and right also. Furnishings consist of table, a few chairs, stove, if available, cupboard, clock and such other things as will give the general setting of an ordinary country home.

(Act opens with Trueletta seen washing dishes through door opening into kitchen. She hums a negro chant or song. Rap on door causes her to come in the room on stage. She goes to the door and admits Silas Watson. Silas enters, looks around.)

SILAS WATSON: Is Uncle Henry in?

TRUELETTA: No sah. Just 'ou wait a bit. Ah sees if I kin find Mr. Wilson. He's round somewhere. You'se jist set deown and ah goes and hunts him. *(Silas come in, takes a chair. Trueletta goes out.)*

SILAS: Poor Hinry, I feel sorry for him. Wonder what that coon's doin' here. Never knowed Henry Wilson to hire a girl to help his wife. Oh, now I understand; his wife's sick. So he's got the black gal to cook till she get's on 'er feet again. Hinry kinder looks on wimmen folks as live stock. Thare's jist so much work in 'em and you're to git 't out. Course cows git sick, so why not wimmen, too. *(Trueletta returns.)*

TRUELETTA: He haint run off. He's out to the

barn fixin' some harnesses. Says soon's he splices the traceries he'll be in.

SILAS: Well, I'll just step out thare. How's Mrs. Wilson? Sick?

TRUELETTA: Sick? Laws a Massa! She ain't got no disease—just plain tired out. Her bone's full of misery from 'ard work, milkin', cookin', washin', bakin', an' ev'ry tother kin' of work round this 'ere house. Golly me, I'se 'most broke mah back carryin' water way up from th' barn heah. Mens folks don't undastand how 'ard a woman works. If ah ever marries I 'aint gwine to work mahself to death for no man. No, siree. (*Shakes her head. Silas goes to the door.*)

SILAS: Who's you goin' to marry, Trueletta?

TRUELETTA: That nigger of yourn, who looks af'er yure hosses, has axed me a hull dozen times. But ah won't have 'im if he bothers me 'ere. Ah'll 'it 'im on his cocoanut.

SILAS: Don't you dare to hurt him. Uncle Henry's at the barn you say? (*Silas leaves Trueletta at door, closing it at right.*)

RASTUS: (*At back through kitchen. Rastus enters with a large Rivel pie in his hand and mouth full. Trueletta sees him—looks mad. Rastus starts to laugh and chokes, explodes pie over the room.*)

TRUELETTA: You good-fur-nothin', black, lazy niggah! You ought to be in th' tenitentiary, where you'se belongs. Stealin' pies! What's difference frum stealin' money? Git right out o' here! Git! (*She throws a broom at him.*)

(*Betty and Jack come in together.*)

BETTY: Why, Trueletta, what does this mean?

(Trueletta starts to explain. Jack pushes her to the kitchen.)

JACK: I won't stand it, Betty. I'm sick of everything. Just consider how hard we've worked. Slaved, that's what. What good does it do? We've a big farm, but he won't improve it, he won't get any up-to-date tools; our cows are only scrubs. No wonder we can't make any money. There's that big swamp field—I told him I'd do the ditching if he'd only buy the tiles. Said he didn't believe in ditching. Just book stuff. Lot he knows about books.

BETTY: Remember, Jack, he's worked hard, too. He's kind and good in his way, but he simply doesn't see things like us.

JACK: And never will. He did let us go through high school, but begrudging every day we went. I'm going to quit. There's no money in farming the way he farms, and he won't let me do things different. So what can I do? I'll teach school. I can do that.

BETTY: Oh, Jack! I know how you feel, but don't get angry with father. He doesn't see things as you do. He's lost his grip. He's always worked hard and things have gone against him.

JACK: That's it. He works with his hands, but not with his brains. I want to use my brains. He won't let me. What's brains for, anyway? I showed him an article in American Agriculturist the other day. He just laughed in my face. Said farm paper editors didn't know anything. And yet that article told exactly how to drain that swamp field. Think of it, Betty. We haven't a decent book in the house. We never get a paper. We never get anything to read any more. Gertrude Bowers wants me to be a teacher.

BETTY: So Gertie wants you to be a teacher. And you want Gertie.

JACK: Yes, I do; but she won't have me. She's the best girl I ever saw. I'd be lucky to get her, but—And by the way, Betty, I don't want you to have anything to do with that city dude—that Will Jefferson, who's around here. I see you and him together a good deal. But don't do it. He's no good. Bud Griffith said he gambles and drinks and tells about how many girls he's got. Don't get silly over him, Betty.

BETTY: Here comes father and that old money lender, Silas Watson. I'll bet he's after more money. They're coming in. I'm going up to mother. Now, cheer up, Jack, everything will come round all right. (*Enter Henry and Silas.*)

HENRY: But, Silas, I haven't the money. I'm in debt now, as you know, so how can I buy more land?

SILAS: Oh! that'll be all right. I don't want any money. I'll take your note and mortgage. Just give me \$500 down to bind the bargain and you c'n pay the rest when you're good and ready. Why, hello, Jack!

HENRY: Jack, Mr. Watson here wants me to buy that 80 of his back of the farm. Kinder think I better do it.

JACK: Why, I thought you hadn't any money.

HENRY: I haven't much, but Silas only wants a little down.

JACK: A little down. The rest on mortgage. Why, father, we're mortgaged up to the neck now. What we want is not more land, but more improvements on what we've got. Mr. Watson, you want to sell your old farm—that old run-down piece which you foreclosed on young Miller. I tell you both we don't want

it. Father, take \$500 and buy some drain tile and get a man to help me and we'll drain the swamp field. There's a fortune in that 40-acre piece. When it's drained it will be worth \$200 an acre. It will grow anything.

HENRY: Tut, tut, my son, you hain't got that book article out of yore mind yet. I don't believe in drainin' land. D'ye hear? I ain't goin' to do it. You! What do you know about farmin'? Know more'n me, do ye? I'll show what we'll do. Still want to sell, Silas?

JACK: Do you mean, father, that you think of buying that old run-down farm?

HENRY: Course I do.

JACK: Then I'll say my piece. You buy that land, when we need money for ditching, a few better cows that will help pay our debts, and papers and books to show us how to farm better, and I'll leave you. I've been obedient to you, worked hard, gone without things that other boys of my age have and stayed right by you, but if you buy more land—that ends it. I'll leave you and I'll leave the farm.

HENRY: You—you won't do no sich thing.

JACK: Buy that land and I'm off forever. (*Turns and goes out.*)

HENRY: That's what we gits for raising boys these days. I'll show him. Silas, let's go and take a look at that land. (*They go out.*) (*Rastus creeps in.*)

RASTUS: Wusen't that yaller gal mad, though? (*Looks all around.*) Wonder where she be now. (*Looks in the kitchen.*) Ah! there she comes. (*Hides behind the door.* *Trueletta comes in with pan of flour.* *Rastus slyly moves up, catches her around the waist*

and aims to kiss her. She throws the pan covering him with flour.)

TRUELETTA: You miserable black nigger! Why do you skeer me so bad? (*She looks at Rastus covered with flour and laughs heartily.*)

RASTUS: See, heah, Miss Niggah gal; who gives you permission to spile my clothes? Why's you so different from other gals? Why's you punish me so disrespectably? Why's you hurts my feelin's? Why's you so all-fired 'sposed to a leetle thrillly sensation? I've a mind to walk rite out o' dis house without sayin' 'nother word to your sniptuous self.

• SAM (*walks in with high boots, one suspender, overalls, straw hat*): He, he, he, Ho, Ho, Ho, Ha, Ha, Ha. Well, I declare! Beats anything ever I see. You's a sight, bof of you. You been a-fi'tin', that's a-what. Rastus, what's you'se been up to? (*Rap at door.*) Who's that? (*To Rastus.*) Stand still, don't you run. (*Opens door. Enter Abagail Jones. Looks at party.*)

ABAGAIL: What scandalous thing's goin' on here? Shame on you! Two men 'posing on one girl. You brutes, you! I declare, every time I sees a man I wants to spit on him; I want to kick him; I want to pull his hair. Us poor women are pestered to death by sich as you men. You just stick around; we never have no peace 'tall. You hear? Not a bit. If I had my way I'd wipe every man off the face of the earth.

SAM: You mean me, too, Abagail?

ABAGAIL: I do, indeed. And what's more, I'd see none of you ever got back.

TRUELETTA: Laws, Missus Abagail. Don't let the men worry you. Men's harmless. They's just babies.

You're got to teach 'em to know their places, like cats. Learn to use your fists and your feets. If wimmens would spunk up an' spoke out the mens would run and do it fast 'nough. I hain't 'fraid of no mans, no sir, I hain't.

ABAGAIL: I didn't come here to talk about such mean things as men. I came to see Mrs. Wilson. Heard she was sick. Can I see her, Trueletta? (Noise at side. Enter Donald. Sam leaves.)

ABAGAIL: Well, well, did you come just because you thought I'd be here?

DONALD: Sure, I knew you were here. Where's Betty? Why, here's Betty now. (Betty enters.)

BETTY: How do you do, Donald? I've just come from mother. She's asleep now, but I think she's better. She's just worn out with all the harvest work and haying; she just had to go to bed for a rest. But sit down. (Trueletta and Rastus move to kitchen.) (Abagail and Donald move to Betty. Jack comes in and greets them.)

DONALD: Jack, you look all flustered up. What's the matter?

JACK: Everything's the matter. I want to do things. I want to give my brain a chance to work. I see great opportunities to make this old farm respond to care and skill. But I can't do anything. Father won't let me. He won't let me help. He doesn't believe in new things, in new ideas. Farming in the old way will no longer pay. Labor is too high, farm prices too low. This is a day of machines, of well-bred stock, drained land, improved seed. The air is full of them, and we stick to the old-fashioned ways of only hard work and little for it.

DONALD: Remember the Fourth Commandment, Jack. Honor—

JACK: Honor, shucks! Don't I honor him? Doesn't Betty honor him? And yet she, poor girl, works day in and day out just as hard as I do. Look at mother. Worn out and still a young woman. Who's to blame? Everybody—you, Abagail (*Abagail starts*), father, the schools, the church. Work is your god. Your brains and souls are nothing. I want to study, to read, to experiment, to use my brains in running this farm. I want to improve it, build it up, make it better. I want to drain that waste land to pay off our debts. That's what I want to do.

ABAGAIL: What's comin' over you boys, anyway? Old folks ain't good enough for you young chaps. Their ways don't suit you. They got on all right when you was kids, but now that you're big enough to help you get mad 'cause your fathers won't turn the farms over to you young snips to play with. Growin' up boys certainly are exasperatin' things to have around.

JACK: Look here, Abagail, you're just as bad as father. What has Mr. Brooks done for his own son? Is he teaching him better methods—you don't know of any. He took Donald out of school so as to work him—work him just like a horse—just like he works his wife. Oh! I'm sick of it—sick of the mean ways of treating women and girls and boys.

ABAGAIL: 'Pon my word, Jack, you are a fool—a bigger fool than I thought you were. (*Betty and Donald go out.*)

ABAGAIL: What a row! Shame on you, Jack!

JACK: There she goes—another. Let a man im-

pose on a woman, abuse her, work her down to the very bone, ill treat her and she'll still stand up for him; and especially when some one tells the truth to his face. Abagail, you're like all the rest. You are just like mother.

ABAGAIL: Jack, don't you dare say a word against your mother. She hasn't her equal anywhere in these parts.

JACK: There you go again. Who's saying anything about mother? I'm rebelling against custom, against injustice. There's mother. All her life she's worked and slaved. She's carried water to cook with, carried water ten thousand miles. And yet, with a little planning, we could have water right in the house. She's had to carry out of doors every bit of the dirty water ever used in this house. And yet a sink and drain to a septic tank might have been installed at the cost of a single illness. She's washed all these dairy pans and crocks that would not be required at all if we had some decent things for the dairy room.

(Enter Gertie Bowers.)

ABAGAIL: Oh, hello, Miss Bowers! You're just in time. This young man is losing his mind. Never saw him in such a fit. He's insultin' everybody. You take him in hand. I'm going out an' tell his father. Jack, you're a fool—do you hear, a great big fool.

GERTIE: What have you said, Jack? What have you done?

JACK: I've done nothing. I am only protesting. I'm all upset. Disgusted with things. I want to scream. I want to yell. I want to kill.

GERTIE: Gracious, don't kill me! What's upset you so?

JACK: Father. He wants to buy more land. It seems we haven't work enough now to do.

GERTIE: Well, can't you talk him out of it?

JACK: Might as well talk to a goose. He won't listen.

GERTIE: What do you want to do?

JACK: What do I want to do? Make what we've got serve us better. Improve the acres that now belong to us. Oh, Gertie, you believe in me, don't you? I want to do right. I don't want to leave home, and I do want to change this old farm around somewhat. I want to improve—improve everything: the cows, the fields, the swamp land. I want a furnace under the house for decent heat, a bathroom for mother's and Betty's comfort, a water system for the washing and doing the kitchen work, and tending the dairy things.

GERTIE: Well, why don't you?

JACK: I don't because I can't. Father won't let me. He gives me no money of my own. I am worse off than the hired man. I just work. I get my board and a room. I manage to get a little for clothes, but that's all. I want books, farm papers, things to do with. It isn't the cost. We could get the money, but he won't. He doesn't believe in such things. So I'm out of place.

GERTIE: Jack, dear friend Jack, I sympathize with you. What you say is the truth, and I have seen it.

JACK: Oh, Gertie, how I do love you for those words! You're the only human being who ever showed a speck of protest against the folly of our way of living. Yes, I do love you.

GERTIE: Jack! Why do you say that?

JACK: Just because I love you. Gertie, marry me. Will you, will you? Oh, do say that you will!

GERTIE: I can't, Jack. You're much to me. Since I've been here I have learned to like you. I admire you—your character, your manliness, your big unselfish self. But I've found out another thing, also. I see how the women here work and slave. Their joy and happiness is largely make-believe. They—

JACK: But, Gertie—

GERTIE: Wait, Jack, let me finish. I like your folks and I like you. But I never want to be a farmer's wife. The life is hard; I couldn't stand it. I don't object to work, but I will not work 16 to 18 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. I'd simply love country life—love to be a farmer's wife—your wife, Jack, if things were different. But country people never seem to think the house is a home; they make it a work mill—just work, work. They seem to think it a sin to be happy—to play a little. They take pride in never having things that other happy people have.

JACK: But, Gertie, you are saying just what I believe. Why—

GERTIE: I know it, I believe it. But what chance would there be with every other farm home against what I want? It takes a community—everybody of the same mind—to get team work in happiness and progress. One wedded pair can't do it alone. Times are not ripe yet, Jack—not for us here. That's why I won't marry you. Don't urge me. What—I—say—ends—the—matter. (*Jack goes out.*)

GERTIE (*steps to kitchen*): You here, Trueletta?

TRUELETTA (*from door inside*): Yessam! I'se here.

GERTIE: Where's Betty?

TRUELETTA: Lawsy, I don't know. Seen her go out with Mistah Brooks, and just drive off with that city dude folks calls Jeffarson.

SAM (*enters*): Where's Jack?

GERTIE: He's just went out in the yard.

(*Henry, Donald and Abagail enter.*)

HENRY: Don't worry, Abagail! Boys ain't what they used to be. When I was a boy we did our work and listened to our elders.

ABAGAIL: That's right. Now these boys insist on doin' the bossing; and if you don't let 'em, they get mad and sulk.

DONALD: That's hardly fair, Mr. Wilson; and it's hardly true. But we boys do think we ought to have a little consideration. Our suggestions ought to count as much as the hired men, but they don't.

ABAGAIL: Donald!

HENRY: They're all alike, Abagail. If there are bigger fools than our young men I never heard of 'em. (*Jack comes in.*)

ABAGAIL: Nor I neither.

JACK: Here's the fruits of your work. It ends as I thought. You've driven her away.

HENRY: What's that; what's the fool talking about?

JACK: This—read this. (*Gives Henry a letter.*)

HENRY (*reads*): Dear Jack: Forgive me. I know what I am doing will break your heart. But I can't help it. I am tired of the farm, of the hard work. I long for a little pleasure, social good times, happiness. Mr. Jefferson (and I am sorry you didn't like him) is going to marry me as soon as we reach the city. Don't follow. I'm dying to have a little fun and a little brightness in my life. Father will be glad I'm gone, but be careful of mother. Your loving sister, Betty.

DONALD (*grabs his hat as he runs out, exclaiming*): If I ever catch that scoundrel I'll kill him. Everybody take notice—I'll kill him!

JACK: Sam, did you see what road that striped skunk took?

SAM: Yassir. He gone to de station.

JACK: Hitch a horse to the buggy and come for me at once.

(Enter Gertie, Rastus, Trueletta. Jack goes upstairs.)

ABAGAIL: More meanness, I'll bet. And a man back of it. Depend for meanness on a man. Oh, how I'd like to shake one a minute!

(Rastus slips in the kitchen and comes out with big butcher's knife.)

HENRY: What you doin' with that?

RASTUS: I'se gwine to fight. Jist let—

GERTIE (*interrupting*): Where's Donald?

RASTUS: I seen him goin' over th' fence and runnin' like blazin' down the road. I don't like that feller. He spit on me once. Jist let me cotch 'im!

GERTIE (*to Henry*): Don't worry, the boys will bring Betty back.

JACK (*enters with a hand bag; changes coat and hat*): I saw mother. She's asleep. I kissed her forehead. She's an angel. I'm off. I've seen so much dreary existence, I leave it to you. (*To Henry.*) You have brought her nearly to her grave, you've driven Betty away to strangers and peril, you've opposed every idea I ever thought out, and now I'll bother you no more. Buy more land, widen your acres, cramp in your soul, drive off your children, but never blame Betty or me. What becomes of us—don't worry; if destruction, it's due to you; if all comes out well, take no credit to yourself.

(*Henry shows great anger. As Jack finishes, Henry knocks him down. Blow made to sound real by clapping hands once. Jack gets up.*)

JACK (*very calm and sweetly*): Good-by, father. You struck your son. For years you have pounded his soul, so that blow was not unexpected. I leave you in peace, with your acts and your conscience. Good-by, everybody. Gertie, good-by. I don't blame you for not wanting to be a farmer's wife.

(*Curtain.*)

ACT II

Bill and Betty's home in the city. Living room modestly furnished.

TRUELETTA (*runs in from inner room excited*): My golly me! I'se skeered purty nigh to death. I jist can't go into that Mr. Jack's room wifout one of 'em germanies gitten' after me. Ough! They're all over me. Gosh, I feels one now. (*Scratches her head.*) This house's jist overrun with kinds of things. When Missus Betty wrote me to come and work for her she never sed a wurd 'bout this here bein' a menagerie for all kinds of bugs and germanies, and bactaries. Ah don't like it 'ere no way. I wants to go back to Cobstown. I prefer roosters to college yaps, anyway. Gee, but ah'd like to see Rastus Washington Lincoln ag'in! The Missis says he's comin' up, bringin' up some of that 'ere swamp land that Mistah Jack's allers talkin' 'bout, for 'im to disanylize. He's huntin' more bugs, I guess.

(Enter Rastus all dressed up in starch clothes. Trueletta drops dishes.)

TRUELETTA: For de lub of heaven! I'se never seen sich an ubstreperous sight in my life. What's you doin' 'ere, anyway, nigger?

RASTUS: Trueletta—or mah name ain't Rastus Washington Lincoln.

TRUELETTA (*Rastus drops sack*): Git out wif that bag. What's you got in hit?

RASTUS: Sile, earth, ground, dirt, mud.

TRUELETTA: Any germanies in it?

RASTUS: What's them? Niggah, that's black swamp. That's that tarnation sile that druv Jack and Betty from 'ome, and braked old Mr. Wilson's 'eart. But, Trueletta, ain't you gwine to shake your old friend's 'and? (*Trueletta goes up. Rastus grabs her and gives her a big smack kiss. They fight, separate and Rastus laughs heartily. Rastus runs out.*)

BETTY (*enters*): Why, Trueletta, what does this noise mean?

TRUELETTA: Missus Betty, who is you think's here? My old trouble—that ornery, diabolical yeller nigger what's used to do hostler wurk for Silas Watson back in Cobstown. He's just came in and dropped that big sack. (*Rastus peeps in, afraid to enter, but all in smiles. Trueletta drags the sack out. Betty straightens things up a bit. Sees Rastus.*)

BETTY: I declare, there's my old friend. Rastus, come right in here. (*Rastus enters. Betty sits.*) How do you do, Rastus. Now, sir, tell me where did you come from.

RASTUS: You looks so fine, I can't speechify. I can't find my bref. It's all gone in my feets.

BETTY: How's father and mother?

RASTUS: Poorly, Missus Betty, mighty poorly. The old place ain't the same no more. They's missed you, Betty—you'se and Mr. Jack and Mr. Donald. So'd everybody miss you. Gee (*smiles all over*), but you'se looks fine! I can't tek my eyes off you. (*Now very seriously.*) And, Missus Betty, ah missed you, too.

BETTY: Come out in the kitchen. I want you to tell me about everybody at home. (*They go out. Trueletta enters. Straightens the table.*)

TRUELETTA: Ah won't say so to 'im, but I'se never so glad to see a body as that old niggah. That smack he gives me certainly wus sweet. I wouldn't tells him, though. Neva tell a hemale you likes to be kissed; if you do, they'll make it a habit. I hate habits. (Sings and moves out.)

(Enter Donald. Takes off his coat. In work clothes. Goes to mirror and brushes hair. Puts on a lighter coat. Sits and reads a paper.)

BETTY (*enters, goes to Donald, kisses him*): Hello dearie, dear.

DONALD: Hello Betty, pet.

BETTY (*sits on arm of chair*): Bet you can't guess who's here. No, don't try. It's Rastus.

DONALD: Rastus who.

BETTY: Rastus Washington Lincoln, goose! He just came from home. Brought some soil for Jack to analyze.

DONALD: Oh, yes, Jack told me. He's making a special study of soil. Said he wanted to analyze that black swamp land of your father's and make some pot experiments with it. Jack thinks that land, if drained, will grow alfalfa. Says if it will, it will make five tons or more to the acre, and 40 acres will make 200 tons. Every ton is worth \$15 right at the farm. That's \$3,000. Jack says one year's crop would pay off the mortgage on the farm.

BETTY: Wonder where Jack is. He ought to be here now. It's almost supper time. He'll be glad to see Rastus.

DONALD: Betty, do you remember four years ago? (*Betty sobs.*) Don't cry, dear. There's nothing to regret. I'm glad everything happened. I'm glad you ran away; glad that Jack quarreled with his father; glad we followed you. You did give us a run, but a doting brother and a loving sweetheart are too much for a cur like that scoundrel that took you away. Let's see, you left your home about four in the afternoon and by nine o'clock we found you, just waiting for a train. Oh, Betty, dear, I know if we had been 20 minutes later you would have been lost to me forever. Are you sorry?

BETTY: Sorry, Donald, darling! I'm happy every minute of the day. I'm never sad. If I were, all I'd need would just be to think of the narrow escape I had. How I do long to tell every girl I know never to have anything to do with a strange man! And to think he was married, too! Oh, it's awful!

DONALD: Now, now, sweetheart, no more of this. What's past is gone forever. He got his deserts. He has still many years in the state's prison, serving that forgery charge. And you're here, my wife, and Jack's here, and we're all well. Jack graduates tomorrow, and he is sure to do credit to all. Isn't this a fine world after all? There's Jack. No more tears. (*Betty runs out.*)

JACK: Hello, old man. In early, aren't you, or am I late? I was busy on some work I was doing. Do you know, old man, I think we struck something good. Got a new kind of spraying material—made it out of lime and sulphur, and it kills the scale on trees. I'm just wild to carry it through. It's certain to be worth thousands of dollars every year to fruit growers.

DONALD: I'm learning things, too, Jack. To have a job on this college farm is almost equal to an education. I don't get all the theory, but I do get the practice. I get theory, too, because I have been reading your books, and the agricultural papers, and today I know a thousand times more about farming than I did four years ago, when we came here.

JACK: You're right, Donald. Hasn't ours been an experience? Just think of it! We came here four years ago with Betty, with hardly a cent between us. To protect Betty's good name, you, the fine brick you are, married her two hours later. And we went to work right away here. You to feed and clothe and keep Betty, and I to make my way through college. They've been busy years, every one, but every day we've learned something. Actually, Donald, we are better off than had we remained at home. I've finished a four-year course in agriculture, paid every cent of expense and have a nice bank account besides. I've milked cows, hauled manure, hoed weeds and done a hundred jobs besides, and yet I've enjoyed every minute. And you, Donald, you've done better. You've proved yourself the best man I ever knew. You've made a home for Betty and me, and you've never once complained.

DONALD: Why, old chap, why should I complain? Haven't you helped? Haven't you paid for your board and room? Haven't you taught me, showed me what to read? Why, man, I couldn't be better off. I have a bank account, too. Betty and I have been saving several dollars every week after we got settled since we've been here. I like my work. I've learned what I wouldn't sell for \$10,000. Some day I'll leave here and farm on my own account and then that knowledge will bring in big dividends.

JACK: That's a fact, Donald. It's been fine for both of us. Heaven sent us here together. Had we had our way we would be at home, doing just like other people. Here we've had a vision; here we see the goodness of things, the big outlook of country life. (*Walks to side and front, looks up, throws out his arms.*) Oh, God, I thank thee for Silas Watson. I thank thee for father's blow. I thank thee for Betty's trouble and for Thy protection at that time. Keep me true, clean minded, teach me to walk straight, let me never forget truth and honor, and direct my footsteps ever to the country—out among my folks, to the fields and the skies. (*Comes back to Donald.*) Well, well, old man, it's a good world, anyway.

BETTY (*enters*): What are you boys doing? So serious? This isn't a funeral. We've got a visitor.

JACK: A visitor—who?

BETTY: Rastus Washington Abraham Lincoln.

JACK: Is that so? Where? I want to see him.

BETTY: He's out in the kitchen with Trueletta. Now, hurry up, supper is nearly ready. (*Jack starts out.*) Don't be gone long, Jack.

BETTY (*puts hand on Donald*): The world's so good to me. I'm so happy. If mother were only here, and father!

DONALD: I'm glad for your sake, Betty. If Jack only had a wife like you! By the way, do you ever hear anything of Gertie Bowers? I wonder where she is.

BETTY: Now, Donald, I'll tell you a secret. Promise you won't tell?

DONALD: Never; I never tell your secrets.

BETTY: Well, I am expecting Gertie tonight. Jack doesn't know that Gertie has been back at Cobstown teaching the old school again this past year. You awful boys were so angry when you left that you never go back and never write, so you don't know what's happening there. Gertie went to the state normal school, studied domestic science and agriculture along with her other studies. She finished her work in three years, and tonight is coming here—to attend commencement and see Jack graduate.

DONALD: She loves him, then.

BETTY: I don't know. She's never said so. But, oh, she's doing such fine work in the old school. Got everybody interested. Has classes in agriculture, cooking, sewing, and teaches a lot of things about country life. She writes that there is coming over the country a new idea in education. But I can't tell you all; you'll have to get her to tell. Now, remember, nothing of this to Jack.

DONALD: Betty, I just love you more and more every day. You are the sweetest and completest girl in all the world.

(Trueletta enters, scratching herself.)

BETTY: What's the matter, Trueletta? You give me the creeps.

TRUELETTA: It's germanies, Mishess Brooks; I cotched 'em in Mister Jack's room.

DONALD: Fiddlesticks, Trueletta! What are you talking about? You mean germs—bacteria. They don't hurt anybody. They are the things that make milk sour and alfalfa to grow.

TRUELETTA: I don't know what they do, but they're growing on me. I feels 'em all over. *(Donald goes*

to Jack's room, brings out a twig with San José scale, some alfalfa or clover roots and some clover seed.)

DONALD: Here they are, they won't hurt. (*As he throws a few seed in the air Trueletta throws up her hands, runs out, exclaiming.*)

TRUELETTA: Good laws a Massa! They's growd as big as beans.

JACK (*enters*): I saw Rastus; he's surely rigged out. He's so happy it oozes out all over his grinning old head.

BETTY: Come, boys, supper is ready and I'm hungry. (*They go out.*)

(*Trueletta, with Rastus in hand, walks in. Rastus still grinning.*)

TRUELETTA: Now, you keep out of my kitchen. I've got to serve this supper and I don't want no niggah around. You set on that chair till I comes for you.

RASTUS: Yessam, purty one. (*He sits, then gets up, walks on tip-toe around the room. Picks up some books.*) Why wasn't I a scholar? I kin read, yessir; I kin read. Readin' ain't my speshulty, howsoever. Neither ain't geogafry, nor figgerin'. I guess I'm best at talkin'. (*In walking around he comes to window, which is open. Sees a man looking in. Let's a yell and runs the opposite way. Collides with Trueletta, who enters from the door. Donald, Betty and Jack come in also. Will Jefferson, as a convict, jumps through the window, a revolver in his hand. Trueletta drops to floor. Rastus jumps under the table.*)

WILL: Hands up. (*Sees Betty.*) My God, you here!

BETTY: Donald!

JACK: Who are you? What are you doing here? Oh, I see you are Will Jefferson. (*Betty stands by Donald.*) Put up your gun. (*Walks up to him.*) Explain.

WILL: Oh, save me! You know all about me. I'm a bad egg, I know. I came here hoping to hide. I escaped from the pen. They're after me. I don't want to be taken back. (*Falls on his knees.*) Save me, oh, save me!

JACK: Get up. Be a man. You might have been, but I doubt if you can. Tell me, do you deserve what you got?

WILL: I guess I do. I didn't mean to do what I did. I got in a hole. I had to have money. I forged the note.

JACK: Then pay the cost. What if we were to save you? You'd be caught any way. You'd be hunted the world over. Give yourself up; you danced, now pay the fiddler. You ruined your own home, forsook your family, nearly ruined another, and now you come cringing for mercy. What would you do with mercy? Break another heart; imperil another soul. Go back to prison, pay that debt. Do right and live right and then when your sentence is finished you can come out and try again. If you were to escape now, it would mean your ruin forever.

(*Heavy rap on door. Billy admits prison guard.*)

PRISON GUARD: You have my man, I see. He gave me a chase. I thought I had lost him. Come here, sir. We go back. Thank you for this trouble.

WILL: I guess this is best. I'll think over what you said. Madam, forgive me for the wrong I once did you. I have no excuse. Fast living in the city did it. Cities are bad places for young people. There are a thousand pitfalls. I fell in them all—drink, dens of vice, gambling, gay lights, amusements. They are all empty. They glitter without, but inside are hollow. Had I been born and reared in the country, had I been required to work, been taught to read and think and study, I'd never been where I am today.

PRISON GUARD: Come on; we got to go.

WILL (*to the others*): Take this from one who's down and out—the world is sweetest in the country; toil in the fields and gardens makes men and women of boys and girls. You think farm work is a hardship; it's a blessing—the best gift that you can get. You think the city is gay and full of happiness; it's full of misery and rotten deceit. You who were not born in the city think if you could only live there, your lives would be full and complete; undeceive yourselves. Rejoice every day of your life that you were born in the country. Go back to it; take the fields to your bosom, make friends of the birds and flowers, be companions of the animals and learn of their kindness, sweetness, unselfishness. In the country you're a man, a real being; in the city you're a make-believe, a slave. (*Turns.*) Prison guard, I'm ready. I'm going back—to prepare myself to be a man. Forgive me, pray for me. I need it; my sins killed my mother; they drove my angel wife to the grave. Good-by. (*They go out.*)

DONALD (*puts arm around Betty's shoulder*): Poor man! My sympathy goes out to him. How true it is: whatsoever one sows that also shall he reap.

BETTY (*puts hands on his shoulders, looks into his face*): The truest, best, kindest, sweetest, noblest man in all the world (*kissing him*).

JACK: Here, this won't do; cheer up, everybody. Rastus, you help Trueletta with the dishes. (*Rastus and Trueletta go out.*) And tomorrow's commencement. (*Rap on door.*) Hello, somebody's coming. (*Goes to the door. Enter Gertie with hand bag.*)

GERTIE: Good evening, all. (*Betty rushes to her and takes her in her arms. Jack looks on thunderstruck. After the embrace she offers her hand to Jack.*)

GERTIE: Aren't you glad to see me, Mr. Wilson?

JACK: Why, Gertie—Miss Bowers, I'm so glad to see you. This is joy, indeed. Here, old man (*to Donald*), welcome our old friend into our home. (*Donald gives his hand, as he does saying*):

DONALD: Welcome, thrice welcome and then another welcome besides!

(*Betty helps her off with her wraps, kisses her again.*)

GERTIE: I'm just in from Cobstown. School closed two weeks ago, but I was finishing up some work with my boys and girls—we're preparing a little ground for some wheat experiments this fall and were anxious to have some cowpeas planted to get their good services during the summer.

JACK: What do you know about cowpeas—you, a girl, a woman?

GERTIE: Why shouldn't I know, why shouldn't every girl know about cowpeas and root tubercles? We learn in school how the earth turns on its axis, so why

shouldn't we know a little about how bacteria build up the earth and make land rich and fertile?

JACK: But Miss Bowers, where did you learn about such things? I thought you hated country things.

GERTIE: No, not that I ever hated the country—I love it. What I hate is the narrow, bitter life that so many farmers unnecessarily build around themselves. Farmers are God's chosen people, with all the very best things of life at their very doors. Yet somehow they just simply fail to take unto themselves these good things that would come of their own accord if they were just given the chance.

BETTY: That's right. I often think now how easy we could have added comforts to our old house—how many good times we could have had—how many evenings in winter we could have enlivened with friends if we had just taken a little pleasure, not trouble, in inviting out friends to come in. Take the telephone. Jack, you know how hard we tried to get father to have one put in; but he said it only contributed to women gossiping and he wouldn't budge an inch. There's dozens of ways to brighten things up on the farm.

DONALD: I have learned lots of things in the four years I've been working here. One is, that money is only a means of doing things. I'm glad of this city experience for one thing: it's taught me what comfort in the home means. Betty, when we get on our own farm, I'll put in modern conveniences the first thing. If a bigger barn is needed it will have to wait until you get a furnace-heated house; and a water system with kitchen sinks, a bathroom and decent lights. I'll see that we have a cozy living room with a table for books

and papers, a real agricultural library and music and comfortable chairs—

BETTY: And nice warm slippers for your big feet.

DONALD: Oh! I mean it. I mean every word I say. I have been figuring these things up. Do you know, one reasonably good-sized bunch of fat hogs will pay for them all?

JACK: Donald, you've learned the greatest lesson there is in agriculture. A four-year course couldn't teach more than what you have just said. Do you agree with me, Miss Bowers?

GERTIE: From the bottom of my heart I do, Mr. Wilson. I don't know if you know it or not, but I, too, am a graduate. Don't look surprised! I finished at the state normal last year. This year I've been teaching at Cobstown. If there's one lesson I have been trying to drive home to my pupils it's been to show the glory of country life. I've been trying to show the dignity of farming over clerking in stores, selling medicines over the counter of a drug store or handing out somebody else's money over the bank counter. I want my boys and girls to go back home after they quit school with the idea of building real, human homes in which growing hearts and brains and souls may be harbored. Mr. Brooks is right. Education is nothing, can mean nothing, if it fails to develop character, or fails to teach how to live.

JACK: I go still further. Some of the meanest men I know are rich in worldly goods. Home is nothing to them; they are mentally and spiritually starved. Some of the worst failures in life are college graduates. There are boys right here in this school who know many languages, who can solve all

sorts of problems in mathematics, who know history by the book and yet they will fail in carrying on the real, worth-while things of life.

*GERTIE: The education Mr. Brooks has acquired is the most deserving of a diploma of nine-tenths of the work done in any school.

BETTY: I didn't know my country boy was a graduate.

GERTIE: He *has* graduated; he's learned how to live.

JACK: And that's the sum and substance of all education.

TRUELETTA (*enters*): Missus Brooks, how 'bout sum bread for breakfus'? We's all out. (*Betty rises and moves back.*)

BETTY: I declare! So many things have happened tonight. I'll soon have you all starving. Come, Donald, walk with me to the bakery. (*Donald rises and takes up his hat.*)

BETTY: You'll excuse us a little while, will you? That diploma of Donald's has so swollen his head I'll have to take him in the air to cool it off.

DONALD: Gertie, it's mighty fine to have you with us again. And I'm so glad (*looking toward Jack*) you like the country.

(*Jack and Gertie arise. Gertie takes a chair toward the front. Jack comes forward. Donald and Betty go out.*)

JACK: You surprised me about your college course. I never knew. Why didn't you write and tell me?

GERTIE: How could I, Mr. Wilson? I—

JACK: Gertie, can't we be just Gertie and Jack as we used to be? (*He takes her hand, she rises and walks away, confused, but happy.*)

JACK: Gertie, won't you speak to me? (*She hangs her head, takes her handkerchief.*) Have four years carried you beyond me? Are you lost to me forever? I swear my love is a thousand times truer and stronger today than ever.

GERTIE: You never said—never wrote—never tried to find me.

JACK: Oh, Gertie, I didn't know. When you said you wouldn't be a farmer's wife, wouldn't marry me, my soul collapsed. I came here—resolved to spend four years in studying agriculture. What hope could I have? Every young man is in love with you. I had no prospects, no money—and, above all—no right even to ask you to wait. That's why I never tried to find you. I couldn't even bear to see you. Now it's different. You came tonight—you are the dawn of a new day to me. If it isn't too late, give me a chance—just a fighting chance—that's all I ask, Gertie.

GERTIE: Yes, Mr.—Jack, I'm listening.

JACK: In my dreams, aye, in my work—in the laboratory—in the barns—summer and winter, I've thought of you; you were my inspiration; you went before me, a spirit, your hand out beckoning me. I often almost stopped. I worked so hard—the tasks often were bitter; I was almost ready to give up. Then you, dear heart, you in spirit appeared. You smiled, you cheered; you were again the inspiration. And I'm here, with just a night between that past and the commencement of tomorrow.

GERTIE (*smiling, taking his hand*): And, Jack, may

it be a real commencement—your own glorious commencement of great and noble deeds!

JACK: Without you, Gertie, it would be the ending, not the commencement.

GERTIE: No, not that, Jack.

JACK: Listen, Gertie. I'm in the dark, I can't see. I only know that I love you—I worship you—mind and soul and body. I want that fighting chance to win you. May I have it?

GERTIE: Four years are much. Love often burns out in a far shorter time. I don't know, Jack! Our lives have been so far apart. You have been in my thoughts also—I often wondered what you were doing, how you were getting along. I knew you were here, but I thought you no longer cared for me. I—

JACK: Gertie, a country boy, just a plain country boy, lays his love at your feet. The boy isn't good enough for you, but his honor is unstained, his love is pure, his past is clean. Otherwise, he hasn't much to offer of that past. But of his future he offers everything—his loyalty, devotion, affection, life. Whatever happens, he'll be true, he will work for your comfort, give his labor into your keeping, his rewards into your hands. Gertie, I can't say more—only this: I love you.

GERTIE: That's much—all any man can say. And I'll answer you. Yes, I will make a promise. If at a later day, when the excitement of this meeting has waned, when in your sober mind you have thought all things out, and you still want me, as you do now, I—(*Jack starts toward her.*) I'll give you my answer. Here's my hand on the promise. (*Jack takes it, covers it with kisses.*)

(Donald and Betty return with several packages.)

BETTY: What a glorious night! Isn't it glorious to be alive?

GERTIE: Indeed, you're right. *(Looks at Jack.)* I can honestly say that life was never so wonderful to me as at this very moment. *(All look up, happy and surprised.)*

JACK: And you mean that? *(She nods her head.)* Betty, Donald, I took advantage of your absence. I asked Gertie again to marry me. She hasn't promised. She gave me hope—a chance—and I shall win.

GERTIE: Yes, that's true, but he must be sure. *(Betty goes up and takes Gertie in her arms.)*

BETTY: The world was never sweeter than tonight. I, too, was never so happy. *(She walks toward kitchen and calls.)* Trueletta! *(No answer.)* I wonder where those two brats have gone.

(Knock at door—enter Mrs. Wilson and Abagail.)

DONALD: No end to surprises.

BETTY: Mother! *(folds her in her arms).*

JACK: Oh, darling mother! *(Jack takes them both in his arms).*

ABAGAIL *(shakes hands with all):* I brought her. She was just pining away. If it hadn't been for men's work, she'd been ten years younger. *(All greet each other.)*

GERTIE: I see that you still find fault with the men.

ABAGAIL: Find fault; they's made up of faults. That's all they is—just faults. Ugh, deliver me from a man!

BETTY: Oh, I'm so happy and so glad you *came!* (*Embraces her again.*) How's father, mother?

MRS. WILSON: He misses you Betty—misses you both. (*Jack looks up, starts.*) He's waiting for you to come home. I knew you wouldn't until Jack finished his schoolin'. He wouldn't write; he doesn't say much, but he feels and I know he's sorry for all that's passed. You mustn't hold things against him—you're his children—he loves you—he's waiting for you to come home. You will, Jack, you will come home? (*All look at Jack, confused.*)

JACK: I can't, mother. I love the old farm, but he looks at things differently than I. I wanted to do some things then, I would want to do a hundred now. He would never consent to what I would want to do.

MRS. WILSON: Jack, my boy (*takes his hand, rises, she pats his hand, he puts his arm about her*), his work is done. Yours begins now. The farm is yours and Betty's, anyway, after our time. Come home, it's to be a partnership. And Betty and Donald, too. There's room for all. You boys are big and strong and full of new ideas. Father and I will help, will work with you. You come back home—back on the old farm—our farm; we'll live a new life henceforth. You'll come? (*Jack doesn't answer.*)

GERTIE: Jack, your mother speaks. You graduate tomorrow; it's your commencement. It's the commencement of your big future in the country, among your own people, among country folk—the big-hearted, loving, wonderful country people. To the country, Jack, which God made—not the city, which man made. That's the place you're called to go. Your mother, Jack, is the messenger—you must answer her.

JACK (*hesitates*): What can I say? Yes, it's to be home—the old home. I will go to father and mother and the farm. And you, Betty and Donald, you're to come, too. And some day I hope another (*looking to Gertie*) will also join in partnership.

(*Curtain*)

NOTE.—At the close of this act, before the curtain goes down, a quartette or double quartette of boys, or boys and girls, representing college boys and girls, may enter and sing a song of their own selection or the following, sung to the chant,

The Gloria Patri

To dig out Greek and Latin roots
We did not come to college;
But of the earth and all her fruits
To get a store of knowledge.
Our thoughts to beef do mostly turn,
To cabbage and tomatoes;
We want to learn the cheapest way
Of raising big potatoes.
And when we've found out how to grow
The rich and luscious pumpkins
Then home to father's farm we'll go
And shine among the bumpkins. Amen.

ACT III

Wilson's living room. Same as Act I, but changed in furnishings. Cozy chairs, stove removed. Book-case with books, telephone and other features of an up-to-date, modern, prosperous farm home living room.

SAM (*coming in with an armful of mail*): Trueletta! I wonder where that miserable, contrary rat head is! (*Sits down in chair, opens a paper, starts to read*).

SAM: Think of me settin' down and readin'. Golly, don't times change, though? When I begun to work on this here farm there wa'n't nary a paper took in this house. Never had to bother about no mail box then. (*Telephone rings.*) Nor about sich things as tellerfones neither! Wonder where that lazy nigger is? (*Goes to 'phone.*) Hullo! Yas! Naw, this ain't her! This's Sam! Yes, Sam. Oh, how de do, Mr. Watson: No, he ain't here now. The hull family left an hour ago in the mobile car. Where? Oh, to John Brooks' house. They'll be back any minute. Good-by. (*Sam hangs up receiver, goes back to chair. Puts his feet on table. Then gets up, goes out to pantry, gets a big piece of pie, starts to eat. Returns. Sits. Puts feet up, gets paper, and reads. Rubs his stomach.*)

SAM: That nigger gal ain't nothin' on looks, but she am mighty swell on cookin' pie. (*Knock on door. Continues to read. Knock a second time.*) Where's that gurl, anyway, I'd like to know. Why ain't she here tendin' her duties? (*Rap continues.*) Come in!

ABAGAIL (*his back to the door, continues to read*): This is hospitality, ain't it? But what can you expect of a man? (*Sam turns, face brightens, jumps up.*)

SAM: Gracious me, am that you, Abagail? I was jist thinkin' of you. I was so lonely.

ABAGAIL: Well, I didn't come to take any of your loneliness away. Whare's the folks?

SAM: I'se here to r'present 'em. I'se all the folks there is just now. All's gone but me.

ABAGAIL: Goodness me, am I alone in this house with you? I was never alone with a man before. Think of my reputation! (*Moves toward door.*)

SAM: Well, I ain't goin' to hurt your reputation! Ain't we's old enough without fearin' such things as reputations? I don't fear mine.

ABAGAIL: You ain't got none and never had none; no man has. I'm goin'. I wouldn't stay here for nothing. (*Sam starts after her.*)

ABAGAIL: Stay where you are. Stay where you are. (*Sam laughs, she goes out. Sam shakes his head, walks about, then sits down.*)

ABAGAIL (*opens door*): Sam, if you'll come out doors I'll talk to you.

SAM (*gets up*): Ain't that just like Abagail. She's so particular; so strictly observant of the rules of conventional observation. I just love her. I'm going right out and ax her if she'll become Mrs. Snipes. (*Goes out.*)

TRUELETTA (*enters from opposite side, singing, stops, sees mail scattered about.*) Great sufferin' catfish! Who done that? That ornery Sam Snipes's been

here. Lordy, how much wurk he does cause me!
(*Sits on chair; folds her arms, leans back.*)

TRUELETTA: Now ain't this comfort?

ABAGAIL (*outside, screams*): Help! (*Trueletta runs out—Sam gives big laugh. Enter Trueletta and Abagail.*)

ABAGAIL: Oh, oh, that awful man tried to kiss me! Me—whose lips has never been kissed before! I'll die—I'll die!

TRUELETTA: Nonsense, Missus Abagail; nonsense; no kiss ever killed nobody.

ABAGAIL: And he spiled it all; I was just gettin' ready to like that big yappin' brute. Now, he up and spiles it all. Believe me, Trueletta, a man's the wust animal ever born.

TRUELETTA: Thare's whare you're wrong, Abagail. For wimmens they're the best animals livin'. Now, there's Rastus. I make him stand 'round and shiver and shake and 'pologize, but that's just done for fun. Rastus, he's axed me nigh onto 37 times to marry him and I am going to do it some day—see if I don't. (*Abagail, with face covered with apron, sobs.*)

(*Sam sticks his head in, motions to Trueletta, who goes out. Trueletta returns, and hands Abagail a big red apple.*)

TRUELETTA: Sam says fur me to hands this to you'se, and if you don'ts mind to come out of doors he wants to show you the new calf's they's got.

ABAGAIL: One of them big Holsteins that costs so much money?

TRUELETTA: Yassam—one of the purtiest cow in-

fants you ever see. You go seen it, Missus. It's worth a lot of lookin' at. (*Abagail goes out.*)

(*At other side, rap on door. Enter Silas Watson.*)

SILAS: Folks home yet?

TRUELETTA: I thinks they's comin' now. I hear their toot. Yas, that's them. (*Enter Betty, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson.*)

BETTY: Good morning, Silas.

HENRY: Mornin' Silas. (*Betty goes out.*)

SARAH: Good mornin', Mr. Watson. Well, I hope?

SILAS: As usual. I'm gradually gettin' old, however.

SARAH: So's we all. But that's to be expected. (*Sarah takes off wraps, goes out.*)

SILAS: You, Henry, you certainly look good. I never knowed you to look so spry.

HENRY: Spry! I'm gettin' younger every day. Why shouldn't I? I'm happy, the old farm is doin' glorious, I've got the finest boy and girl and son-in-law in all the county. And Sarah and me's joyful as birds.

SILAS: I was just thinkin', Henry, what young blood is able to do. Three years ago you was discouraged—you were ready to quit—everything was wrong—the farm slidin' back—and then Jack came home from the agricultural college—and just look at things today!

(*Betty enters, goes to telephone, rings and gives number.*)

HENRY: That's so. It looks a miracle, don't it?

But it ain't. It's simply these boys here's mixed some brains up in the soil. That 'splains everything.

BETTY: That you, Gertie? This is Betty. Say, Gertie, I want you to come over right away and spend the day and night with us. This is the seventh anniversary of Donald's and my wedding. You've got to come. I'll send Rastus in the car for you. Good-by, dearie. (*Hangs up receiver.*)

SILAS: I came out today as Jack axed me to. He said he has a certified check and to bring your old note with me. Here it is. (*Takes it out of his pocket.*)

HENRY: That note is over fifteen years old. I tried hard, Silas, to pay it. But I was working the wrong way. I now see it was impossible. I farmed wrong; I didn't keep pace with progress. Farming was just muscle with me. I didn't use what little brains I got. I saved and saved. I hung onto pennies; if I had spent dimes on improvement I would have got dollars in return.

SILAS: It's all in the way you save and the way you spend.

HENRY: Exactly. You can lose money by saving—and save money by spending—if you spend right. Money spent for the right kind of fertilizers brings more money back. Money spent on race horses is money throwed away. Money spent on drainin' lands is investment.

SILAS: I know it, Henry. Didn't I say so when Jack and Donald came to me and asked to borrow \$1,800? I says: "Boys, what's she fur?" "Drainin' that swamp," they said. "You can have it," I said, right off the bat. "But will it cost all of that to drain that field?" I said. "No," they said; "we want to put in

a septic tank—that'll cost \$35. We've got to put in a water system and a bathroom—that's \$260 more," they said. "And we got to put furnace heat in—that's \$210 more; and then we've got to do a little paintin' and fixin' up." "It's yours, boys," I said. Henry, money for improvements never fails to earn interest, 'specially if spent on drainage and home conveniences.

HENRY: And look at things today! Silas, this here farm is actually worth more'n three times what it was three years ago.

SILAS: When them boys come back ag'in and said: "Silas, we want to borry \$1,000 more," well, I'm not saying I wasn't disturbed, but I was game. I looked square at 'em and said: "Boys, what's she fur?" And they came right square back: "\$250 for a pure-bred Holstein bull, \$300 for pure-bred Holstein heifers, \$300 for four good grades and \$150 for some pure-bred Duroc-Jersey hogs." And I said: "It's yourn, boys," without batting an eye.

HENRY: Here come the boys now.

JACK and DONALD: How do you do, Mr. Watson?

SILAS: Howdy, boys. I'm here, you see.

JACK: Yes, and we're ready for you. Here's your \$3,000, Silas, and interest. The check is certified. (*Silas hands over note. Jack tears it in two.*)

JACK: Our last debt. The old mortgage is wiped out, the old farm is clean as a whistle. The big swamp field, the new cows and the new hogs did the job.

DONALD: Jack, tell Mr. Watson about the alfalfa in the swamp.

JACK: Well, you know that old field; 40 acres in it; soil black and rich, but very wet. I studied it care-

fully when I came back from college; found it needed lime and potash. We tile-drained. It was a big job, wasn't it, Donald?

DONALD: Indeed it was; but we plowed it before winter and limed it and in the spring put it to silage corn.

JACK: Donald and I had some money we saved up during the years at college. We used some of that money for building a hollow tile silo. We had that corn planted early and in the silo in time to plow the field the same fall. By August the land was ready for bone and potash and alfalfa bacteria and the seed.

DONALD: It kept us on the jump. And after it was seeded we visited that field every day. People say there's no excitement in the country—no sensations—nothing to interest one! Watching that alfalfa brought me more excitement than any other event of my life.

JACK: And everything went well; the seed had been tested and it came right up; in two months that field was a beautiful sight—every spot was fine and it stood nearly a foot high when the snows came. The next spring and summer—we cut it four times—fully 150 tons.

HENRY: The finest hay I ever see and the biggest crop.

JACK: We couldn't use half of it. We actually sold enough hay to pay you that first money we borrowed. The balance of the hay we fed. How the stock did feast on it! We never before got so much milk. Even the old scrub cows caught the spirit and competed with the pure-breds in shelling out the milk.

SILAS: It's wonderful work you've done.

DONALD: And the swamp field did it. Just think of it! We've built new fences around every field on the farm, put up two more silos, enlarged the barn, trebled the number of cows, got a complete outfit of tools and implements, started a fine new orchard, put an addition to the house and fixed it up with every modern convenience—and it was all done out of that old unused swamp land.

HENRY: And there's many more acres in these parts just like it. The same could be done with them.

JACK: That's true. It's possible to take any farm, and by studying its needs to make it respond as this one has. If only the boys, the thinking farm boys, would turn their minds to the home farms and after completing their education, return to them, they would find not only interesting work, but more profit and joy than opens in any other direction. (*Betty comes in with Gertie, who just arrives.*)

GERTIE: Mr. Wilson, how fine you look! Mr. Watson, how are you? How do, Donald? Jack, how are you?

(*Henry and Silas step to the rear. Billy and Betty, Jack and Gertie are together.*)

JACK: Gertie, we've just paid the last cent we owe. We've won our farm fight. (*Silas and Henry interrupt and come forward.*)

HENRY: Wonder if you'll excuse me and Silas a little. I want to show him about, and let him have a look at the Holsteins. (*They go out.*)

GERTIE: You dandy boys, I want to thank you for your help in my school fight. We've won, in a bigger and better school. The board of education has decided to add two more rooms, combine in our school

four other districts, get two more teachers and make a real country life school. It's great. We're to have a domestic science laboratory and an agricultural laboratory, and from now we can train the boys and girls in the work that will help them after they leave school.

DONALD: That fight was yours, Gertie. You fought it fair and square and won. The battle, however, was fought years ago, when you came here and started that new kind of school. Pshaw, what's been done today was just the natural outcome.

BETTY: That's right, Gertie. I am told people didn't like some of the things you did when you first came back from the normal school. They wanted you to teach just the same things as the other teachers had been teaching.

GERTIE: I know it. And I did lots of crying over it, too, but what was I to do? Nearly every boy and girl who came to my school was going to be a farmer—he was going to be a farmer, whether he wanted to be or not. I decided that if that was the case he ought to be a good farmer and the girls good wives who understood at least the more important things about homemaking. I studied and thought and worked. At last I saw my duty and I tried to do it.

DONALD: And you've done it better than any man could do it.

BETTY: That's so, and there's no denying it.

GERTIE: Whether it's so or not I was honest in what I did.

BETTY: This is all very interesting, but we've got things to do. Gertie, you come with me. I've some things to talk over with mother about tonight. What will you boys do?

JACK: That reminds me, Donald; let's go to the office—we must finish up those dairy records, and figure out the feed rations for the cows that are to go on the silage-alfalfa test. The quicker at it, the quicker done. (*They go out.*)

(Enter Rastus and Trueletta bending up and down with laughter.)

TRUELETTA: Don't you dare tell, niggah!

RASTUS: Of course I won't. But wa'n't he pleadin' though? (*Continues to laugh.*)

TRUELETTA: He certainly wus! (*Laughs.*)

RASTUS: And she wasn't objectin' neither. Oh, my, oh my! (*Laughs louder than ever. Both laugh.*) Wonder what that Holstein calf thought.

RASTUS: Trueletta! (*Soberly.*)

TRUELETTA: What, Rastus? (*Also soberly.*)

RASTUS: Come here. (*She comes.*)

TRUELETTA: What?

RASTUS: You take me. (*His arm about her, they go out.*)

(*Henry and Silas return. Henry gets down his pipe, fills it and smokes.*)

SILAS: It's simply wonderful what those boys have done.

HENRY: They done it, Silas; they done it.

SILAS: By knowin' how.

HENRY: Knowin' how and havin' faith.

SILAS: And not afeard to work.

HENRY: Not only not afeard to work, but doin' the work well.

SILAS: And livin' up to their word.

HENRY: And livin' up to their word.

SILAS: Do you know, Henry, the best credit a man's got is meetin' every promise he makes? No man should ever make a promise unless he knows he can meet it.

HENRY: Silas, farmin's changin'. It's changin' in every way. Today it consists of new things. Do you know nothin's the same as when we was boys. The trouble is, methods change, tools change, customs change, but us farmers we jist sit tight and never budge. We've got to progress with the rest of things.

SILAS: The old order changeth.

HENRY: Exactly. The old order changeth.

SILAS: Cows have changed, pigs have changed, chickens, corn, wheat, tools, fences, barns, everything has been improved or changed.

HENRY: Everything but people. We're just as sot in our ways, just as stubborn as ever.

SILAS: And get mad if someone insists on doin' things in a better way.

HENRY: Exactly.

SILAS: It's been my observation, Henry, that the man who is keenest to learn about new things in agriculture is them with brains and push who leaves for the town or city.

HENRY: That's true of the past, but right now the brightest boys are actually going off to college to study agriculture with the idea of coming back home and runnin' the home farm.

SILAS: As your boys have done.

HENRY: Exactly. As Jack did, although I opposed. Jack tells me that over 50,000 boys last year were students of agriculture in the different colleges.

SILAS: Wonderful, isn't it?

HENRY: And if they do half as well as Jack and Donald, wonderful will be the results.

(*Jack comes in.*)

JACK: Father, what do you think? By changing our feeding ration of the cows last month, we actually have made \$59 clear.

HENRY: How's that?

JACK: Well, you know we had a lot of corn. We grew it primarily to feed. Well, corn's gone up. I figured out that we might better sell corn and buy a little cottonseed meal. After swopping feeds and paying for the extra labor of hauling, we made money.

SILAS: That's scientific farming.

HENRY: Exactly.

JACK: Call it what you will. It's just good plain business. We figured a bit and made money on the figuring. But there's another thing. The cottonseed meal contains four times as much fertility as corn; in fact, over twice as much nitrogen as all the fertilizer elements in corn. Selling corn and buying meal not only brings more money for milk, but adds to our fertilizer capital deposited in the soil.

SILAS: Wonderful!

HENRY: Wonderful!

(*Enter Donald.*)

DONALD: Say, folks, I want to show you something in the orchard. Where we thinned the fruit and

fertilized those old apple trees and sprayed them, some remarkable results are showing up.

HENRY and SILAS: All right.

SILAS: We're in fur anything.

(All depart but Jack. He sits, takes pencil and starts to draw.)

GERTIE (enters): Everybody out? (Jack rises, goes to Gertie.)

JACK: I am glad you came in. I've just started a little plan of making over a change or two in this house.

GERTIE: What's Prince Jack up to now? A ball-room or prison cell?

JACK: Neither, Mistress Sarcasm; I am just thinking how to get some outside sleeping rooms, and an open dining and living room on to this house.

GERTIE (clapping hands): Fine! What a wonderful man you are!

JACK: Don't make fun of me, Gertie. I'm in earnest.

GERTIE: All right, I know you are. Now tell me and I'll promise not to interrupt you once.

JACK: Well, here's the idea. We live in the country. For six months we can eat and sit out of doors and enjoy the lovely air. And, if properly made, we could sleep out of doors also; if not for all the year, then the greater part of it. And why not? Donald and I can do much of the work ourselves.

GERTIE: Oh, won't that be fine! How did you ever think of it?

JACK: I've been thinking about it for some time, but I've been so busy, I've never been able to get around to it.

GERTIE: Why don't more farmers do the same thing so they can live out of doors?

JACK: Others are just like us, too busy to get at it. But somebody has to make a start. So we'll do it.

GERTIE: It's simply glorious!

JACK: The trouble is, Gertie, too many folks have been used to thinking about the house as just four walls; just as a place to eat and to sleep and to wash in. They have not made home attractive; they have not got out all the possibilities of the soil; they have merely been farmers, not getting enough profit out of their crops to improve the old farm or to make the home beautiful. Then the young folks, after a while, leave the farm. Home, Gertie, is love and affection; it is the hearthstone; it is the rocking cradle; it is the prattling child; it is the mother's smile; it is the father's strong right arm; it is the dearest place on earth.

GERTIE: Oh, Jack, what a wonderful man you are!
(*Jack looks up.*)

JACK: Only common sense, Gertie.

GERTIE (*continues*): What a perfectly wonderful man you are, so grand (*Jack looks intently*), so good, so handsome (*Jack looks still more intently*), so lovable (*Jack rushes over, takes her hands*), and you're such a dear!

JACK (*slipping back a bit, looking at her*): Gertie, I am going to marry you whether you will take me or not. Do you hear?

GERTIE: Yes, dear, I hear, and I second the motion.

JACK: Sweetheart!

GERTIE: I always intended to marry you. I never loved anybody else. But I wanted you to be sure also. I wanted you to start your work and I wanted a chance to finish mine. I did so much want to get that school made over, just as you have made over this farm, before beginning this—the greatest, most glorious event of my life.

JACK: This is Betty's and Billy's seventh anniversary. We'll make it the beginning of a new glory for us also. Oh, Gertie!

(Enter Mrs. Wilson and Betty. Betty goes to Jack and Gertie.)

BETTY: Seven years ago today—and I am so happy!

GERTIE: And this is the happiest day of my life.

JACK: Not to be eclipsed—it's also the happiest day of mine.

BETTY (smiling): At last, you old pokes—I knew all along.

(Rastus behind Sam and Abagail and from without.)

RASTUS: You'se bof, bof of you, march right in there. I cotched you. And I can prove it by that Holstein calf. (Sam and Abagail hand in hand, with shy, dropped faces, walk in.)

RASTUS: Now tell! (Sam looks to Abagail, Abagail to Sam, neither says anything.)

RASTUS (to Sam and Abagail): Well, I sees I'll have to speak fur ye. Mr. Jack, I'se a confession to make. I 'fess that these two peoples: to wits, Sam

Snipes and Abagail Jones, have this day 'fessed their dyin' devotion to each and t'other, and they axes your permission to tie up.

(Sam and Abagail smile, twist their feet and sweetly look at each other.)

JACK: Sam, is this so? *(Sam just grins.)* Abagail, is what Rastus says true? *(She smiles just as Sam.)* I see, your fervent words speak loud. Your request is granted. Blessings on you both!

(Enter Donald, Henry and Silas.)

HENRY: Why, what's all this mean? Wedding bells, I do declare! *(He walks up to Sam and Abagail.)* To think that this has been goin' on and I never suspected it!

BETTY: There's many things you don't suspect, father. I have the great and delightful privilege of announcing that John Wilson, Jr., alias Jack, and Gertrude Bowers have this day contracted to marry also.

HENRY: Call that news, lady? Their eyes and their actions made that announcement long ago. Me and mother may be gettin' old, but we ain't infants when it comes to love makin', are we mother? *(Walks over and puts his arm around her.)*

(Betty and Donald together, Sam and Abagail to rear at right. Rastus brings in Trueletta at rear to left. Henry and Sarah at left toward front, Donald and Betty toward front, even with Henry and Sarah. Silas at side, further forward. Jack and Gertie together, slightly forward in center of line where are stationed Donald, Betty, Henry and Sarah.)

JACK: There's nothing I need to say. It seems that you all know my affairs. And I don't care. I do

love Gertie, have loved her ever since she came here a flower and a song. She's to be a farmer's wife, though once she said she wouldn't. I am a farmer and proud of it. To me the promise of the present is a glorious agriculture for the future.

(*Curtain*)

NOTE.—If desired an old-fashioned dance may be introduced at the close of Act III, to be danced as the curtain goes down. Jack, Gertie, Donald and Betty form one square; Sam, Abagail, Rastus and Trueletta a second. Silas calls out and Henry and Sarah stand together, looking on, with Henry's arm about Sarah, both in pleasing sympathy and joy.



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